

Suggested Remarks
USAID Mission Director Jon Lindborg
CLIC Turn-over Ceremony
Manongol NHS
Kidapawan City
November 24, 2006

Secretary Neri
Governor Piñol,
Mayor Gantuangco;
Principal Villegas;
PTCA President Tan;
Friends from NEDA, USAID and the GEM Program;
Teachers and Students, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good day and Mabuhay!

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be here with you all today, as we formally turn over a computer assistance package to the Manongol National High School in Kidapawan City.

This morning, we are providing seven internet-connected computers, a printer, software, and related items to the PTCA and the school. In

addition, over the next two months, selected teachers from the school will receive training on using computers and the resources of the internet to enrich the school's educational programs.

These internet-connected computers are being provided under USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao, or GEM Program, which encourages teachers and students to use computers and the internet as resources to enhance learning. The computers also enable students to tap the vast resources of the internet to conduct research, establish their own e-mail accounts, and communicate with other students throughout the world.

The internet connection provides you access to a vast highway that can take you beyond the

borders of your community, beyond your province, and beyond your country, and indeed, to any destination in the world.

You can now be connected, at the click of a mouse, to information and to people from other societies and cultures all around the world.

So, though you may live geographically on an island, you now are part of an inter-connected, borderless world.

Some sociologists and economists see the peoples of the world as being split into two distinct groups: those with access to the new information technologies, and those without such access. They refer to the split as "the digital divide." Those people without access to the new

technologies are seen as being on "the wrong side of the digital divide."

The objectives of the Government of the Philippines and the U.S. Government in supporting the computerization program is to try to make sure that children in Mindanao and the province of North Cotabato do not end up on the wrong side of the digital divide.

As a GEM partner, the Manongol National High School has received the resources needed to get its students started on the road to the global information community. Through USAID's GEM Program, this school thus becomes part of an expanding network of 455 schools in Mindanao and North Cotabato that are already participating in the global community. We are adding additional

schools to this network at the rate of more than one school per day.

The Manongol National High School is one of 77 schools in the Province of North Cotabato—and one of seven schools in Kidapawan—that have become our partners. But it will not be the last. We anticipate providing internet-connected computers to several more schools in North Cotabato province over the coming months.

The Government of the Philippines, through the National Economic and Development Authority and the Mindanao Economic Development Council, requested assistance from the United States Government in its efforts to ensure that students from Mindanao have access to computers and the internet. And the US Government,

through USAID, is happy to provide such assistance.

Thus, this installation really does represent a true partnership, between the US and Philippines Governments, on the one hand, and the parents and teachers of this school, represented here today by Ms. Ramona S. Tan, the President of the Manongol National High School PTCA, on the other hand. The PTCA has agreed to accept financial responsibility for the maintenance of these computers, and for paying the internet connection fees at the end of one year. This is wonderful! It shows how much the parents of students at this school care about the quality of their children's education. Students, let's give a big round of applause to show our

appreciation for your parents' commitment to your education.

We recognize and understand that the seven computers being turned over here today may not be sufficient to provide every student in this school with as much computer time as he or she would like, or might need. But we think these computers provide a good start. And we are prepared to do more. We will increase the number of computers provided to this school, if you will also do more.

If the PTCA is prepared, using resources it obtains from its own members or from the community at large, to procure additional computers for the school, we will match whatever the PTCA does. If the PTCA will provide one

additional computer, so will we! If the PTCA will provide five additional computers, we will also provide five additional computers.

This is our challenge to you, as President of the PTCA, Ms. Tan, and to the members of the PTCA. I hope that, together, we will be able to expand the current facilities, and strengthen our partnership with the PTCA, with the parents, and, most importantly, with the students.

Ms. PTCA President, the ball is in your court.

Thank you, Principal Villegas and PTCA President Tan, for representing and supporting the Manongol National High School so ably and effectively. Thanks also to all of you present

here for your warm welcome and hospitality. Good
Day.